

Permanency



A two-year-old child was placed into emergency custody when substance abuse rendered her mother incapable of providing for her basic needs. Despite initial hesitancy, the mother complied with every facet of the reunification plan, completing substance abuse treatment and other requirements. The child was reunified with her mother after a safety plan and a service contract were implemented. Unannounced visits following reunification revealed a mother who showed no indicators of substance use, a well-kept home and a healthy, happy toddler.

News Advisory, March 2004
Performance Report, 2003

Objective: Increase permanency for children placed in out-of-home care

Measured by: Children returned to their parents (reunification)

State law requires children to be reunified with their parents or legal guardians as expediently as possible whenever it is safe and in the best interest of a child. The Children's Administration makes every effort to comply with the letter and spirit of reunification mandates.

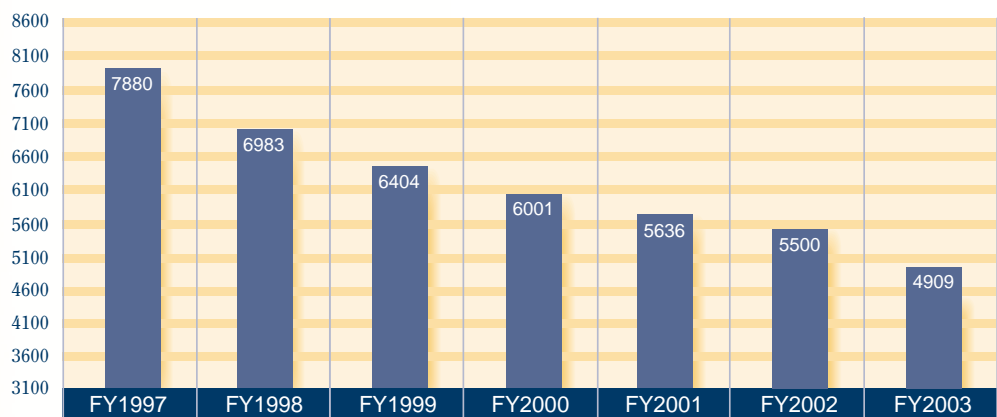
Over the course of the past seven years, the number of children who have been reunified with their parents has decreased markedly. The administration has explored causative factors related to this decline.

Most notably are the increasingly complex challenges faced by children coming into state care and the families of which they are a part. Parental substance abuse, mental health issues and myriad stressors often make reunification at best inadvisable and at worst, impossible.

Reductions in reunification can be partly attributed to increased emphasis upon the safety of children in accordance with the Kids Come First Action Agenda which states in part, "Preservation of the family, and a permanent home are very important to the well-being of the child and should be held as goals for the child protection effort. However, when interests compete, the endangered child is the primary person CPS is charged to protect."

Concurrent to the decrease in the number of children reunified with their families, the administration has tracked decreases in the number of children entering out-of-home placement and those re-entering out-of-home care following reunification. These trends seem to indicate improved support to families initially and improved decision-making about the circumstances under which a child should be returned home.

Reunifications**



** Children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their parents during the fiscal year.